



Formosan Association for Public Affairs

台灣人公共事務會

fapa.org | (202) 547-3686  
552 7th St SE, Washington, DC 20003

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Contact: 202-600-6819

## **FAPA CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENACTMENT OF U.S. PASSPORT “PLACE OF BIRTH: ‘TAIWAN’” CAMPAIGN AND CALLS FOR END TO OUTDATED “ONE CHINA POLICY”**

Before 1994, Taiwanese Americans were forced to list “China” as their place of birth on U.S. passports, a misrepresentation that fueled a policy campaign by the Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA) advocating to correct this oversight and affirm the rightful identity of Taiwanese Americans.

October 25, 2024, marks the 30th anniversary of enacting the 1994 U.S. passport birthplace “Taiwan” campaign — a landmark shift for Taiwanese Americans’ identity and representation. FAPA successfully championed a crucial policy change allowing individuals to designate “Taiwan” as their place of birth on U.S. passports.

Three decades ago, FAPA and our members worked with our friends in both chambers of U.S. Congress to propose, introduce, and successfully pass this crucial birthplace policy change. Since these bills became law, Taiwanese Americans born in Taiwan could finally have “Taiwan” rightly designated as their place of birth on their U.S. passports.

Prior to the FAPA policy campaign, naturalized U.S. citizens born in “Taiwan” had to be falsely recorded as born in “China” on their U.S. passports, which incorrectly implied that “Taiwan is part of China” and offensively suggested that Taiwanese Americans were also “Chinese” — an identity that most of them did not recognize and share. Taiwanese Americans were frustrated by the unjust treatment to mislabel their birthplace for decades.

### **Part I: “Record of Place of Birth for Taiwanese Americans”**

#### **In September 1991, FAPA launched a campaign to correct Taiwanese Americans’ birthplace designation in U.S. passports from “China” to “Taiwan.”**

In 1992, FAPA asked members of Congress to write to the Department of State to allow this correction, but to no avail. Although the U.S. “One-China policy” has never recognized that Taiwan is part of China, the State Department wrongly cited this policy and replied that it couldn’t change the birthplace designation from “China” to “Taiwan” for Taiwanese Americans unless the U.S. changed this policy.

The incident showed clearly how highly confusing and misleading the “One-China policy” is and how easily it could lead to harmful misinterpretations, even for the State Department and its officials.

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*The goals of FAPA are: (1) To promote international support for the right of the people of Taiwan to establish an independent and democratic country and to join the international community; (2) To promote relations and cooperation between Taiwan and the United States; (3) To protect the right of self-determination for the people of Taiwan; (4) To promote peace and security for Taiwan; and (5) To advance the rights and interests of Taiwanese communities throughout the world.*



In early 1993, under the leadership of National President John Chen, FAPA shifted its strategy to correct Taiwanese Americans' birthplace designation through "congressional legislation." With the help of Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA) and Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI), the place of birth "Taiwan" amendment was soon included in the "Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995."

**This bill was passed and became law in April 1994.** The Act's Section 132, titled "Record of Place of Birth for Taiwanese-Americans," requires the Secretary of State to permit U.S. citizens born in Taiwan to have their place of birth recorded as "Taiwan" on their "registration of birth" or "certification of nationality."

PUBLIC LAW 103-236—APR. 30, 1994

108 STAT. 395

**SEC. 132. RECORD OF PLACE OF BIRTH FOR TAIWANESE-AMERICANS.** 22 USC 2705  
note.

For purposes of the registration of birth or certification of nationality of a United States citizen born in Taiwan, the Secretary of State shall permit the place of birth to be recorded as Taiwan.

## Part II: Specifying the "Place of Birth: 'Taiwan'" designation to be applied in U.S. Passports

Despite the passage of the "Record of Place of Birth for Taiwanese-Americans," the then State Department spokesperson Mike McCurry issued a statement in May 1994, surprisingly saying that the birthplace "Taiwan" amendment for Taiwanese Americans does not affect designation on U.S. passports. Taiwanese Americans felt genuinely humiliated by such unreasonable interpretation by the State Department, which certainly was misled again by its confusing "One-China policy."

Nevertheless, FAPA was not deterred by this setback and did not give up. In the summer of 1994, FAPA South Florida Chapter President Song Yea Lee was invited by Rep. Peter Deutsch (D-FL) to meet and even jog with U.S. President Bill Clinton at the Miami Beach. Chapter President Lee used this rare opportunity to seek Clinton's support to correct Taiwanese Americans' place of birth designation in U.S. passports from "China" to "Taiwan."

FAPA headquarters and Chapter President Song Yea Lee also immediately worked with Rep. Deutsch to propose a technical amendment to the same aforementioned "Foreign Relations Authorization Act" by inserting "or issuance of a passport" to its Section 132. Such a correction would make it explicitly clear that this birthplace amendment would allow Taiwan-born Taiwanese Americans to designate "Taiwan" as their place of birth on their "U.S. passports."

This technical amendment proposal was passed in the House on September 19 then in the Senate on October 7. **On October 25, 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the bill into law for Taiwanese Americans to designate their place of birth as Taiwan in U.S. passports, effective immediately.**



108 STAT. 4302

PUBLIC LAW 103-415—OCT. 25, 1994

*Ante*, p. 395.

(r) Section 132 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995 (Public Law 103-236) is amended by inserting “or issuance of a passport” after “nationality”.

Thus, completing the policy campaign for Taiwanese Americans to designate Taiwan as their rightful place of birth on U.S. passports, affecting all Taiwanese Americans to this day.

### Part III: Implementation of Law

On the night of November 16, 1994, Chian-Ho Yang, a Taiwanese immigrant to the U.S. widely regarded as Taiwan’s first female journalist, informed the FAPA headquarters that she had earlier that afternoon received her U.S. passport with “Taiwan” listed as her place of birth, and thanked FAPA for the successful policy advocacy campaign.

The moment that FAPA was notified of the first successful implementation of the birthplace amendment marked a long overdue victory and a proud new beginning for all Taiwanese Americans, as immigrants born in Taiwan could finally and rightfully have “Taiwan” instead of “China” recognized as their birthplace on U.S. passports and other official documents.

The 1994 enactment and continued implementation of this birthplace “Taiwan” amendment reaffirmed the U.S. position that “Taiwan is not part of China” and marked a critical step for the U.S. government to gradually move toward implicitly recognizing the independence of Taiwan, over which the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has never exercised control.

Without knowing the history, people might find it hard to imagine that Taiwanese Americans born in “Taiwan” had been forced to be wrongly recorded as born in “China” on U.S. official documents for decades. We should remember that the things we enjoy and take for granted now may not have been the case in the past.

This change is a testament to the unwavering advocacy of those who came before us, as the freedoms we enjoy today are the result of dedicated efforts to rectify injustices and ensure accurate representation for future generations.

On this 30th anniversary of enacting the U.S. passport birthplace “Taiwan” amendment, we celebrate this milestone victory and retrospect relevant history. We also want to call on the U.S. to end its highly confusing and harmful “One China policy” (as we have seen during the birthplace correction campaign) and instead adopt a more realistic “One China, One Taiwan policy” that recognizes the reality that Taiwan is an independent sovereign country and that Taiwan and China are not subordinate to each other.

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